

T H O M A S H . P A T E

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## Every Spray of Blood a Blessing

“Nowhere else in history has there ever been a flag that stands for the right to burn itself. This is the fractal of our flag. It stands for the right to destroy itself.”

—Ken Kesey

A downpour of metal and shrapnel. Bullets whip and whiz, but you don't hear them.  
They do not exist. The only thing that exists is the presence of death as tangible as the hand  
Digging deep in his neck. Sticky blood makes the ordeal almost impossible and every time his  
Heart beats a geyser of blood shoots a foot high and you do your best to avoid it.  
Not because you can't or won't reconcile the blood, but because the carotid artery is there,  
Somewhere. Every spray of blood a blessing. He lives. Maybe, if you succeed  
He will continue to live. The fact you are not covered, open, a nameless, faceless target,  
A hated American comes later. Now you fight the viscera of his neck, blood as thick as

Oil fights you. The real enemy, time, is slipping and so is he. The  
spraying blood abates,  
But you find the artery. Where his neck ends and your hand begins is  
indistinguishable.  
Finally, the explosions and gun shots become real. You take his nine-  
millimeter from his chest  
And begin firing with your left hand. Your right holding his life. Time  
is useless as you wait.  
And fire. And wait. The anarchy subsides. Fellows aid you. A medic  
clamps his artery  
With hemostats. Your hand aches from squeezing so long, and you  
realize it's over.  
He lived. You lived. You walk away covered in blood. You smell it,  
stingy as fresh cut grass.  
You vomit. Then you collapse. No one can see and you begin to cry  
until it becomes thick, deep  
Sobs. You have no idea why the tears are as heavy as the blood stained  
armor across your chest.

Later they give you a medal for valor and call you a hero. A nameless  
General shakes your  
Hand. You hate him. You never tell this story to anyone until now and  
only now because it is  
Honest and disgusting and you are disturbed at an America that you  
realize was only a myth.  
In combat there was a purity, a rawness that haunted your sleep. You  
woke, freezing in sweat,  
And it was screams, your screams that pulled you from a restless  
slumber. Again, you sob  
But this time you know why. Your America, your flag burning America  
has been a lie and  
You are ashamed.

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